

## **The Final Project Guidelines**

### **Decoding Creativity, Fall 2008**

#### **The Objective**

The objective of this final exercise is to translate your intuition, conviction, feelings, emotions, and beliefs, into a design that connects them to other elements of your life, with each component nourishing each other and opening up possibilities, without burning out or clogging up, much like our body in a healthy state.

A design functions best when it's at its simplest, and there it takes on an aesthetic integrity not unlike a work of art, literature or music.

What does this mean?

You are going to build with your intuition and slice away at it with Occam's razor. You are going to let your gut feelings lead you and evaluate from an outsider's critical view almost simultaneously. You are going to examine each element and every connection and check them for relevance and validity, and throw out or change anything that is trivial. You are going to be rigorous and ruthless.

#### **In a Nutshell**

What I would like you to focus on is not so much the components or contents (you already have a concrete grasp of who you are and what you like to do), but the connection between the components, that is, the design. This means that you must be aware of what or who you are connecting to, what you want this connection to achieve, and how efficient and effective it is.

Remember, you want *maximum output from minimum input*.

#### **Analogy**

A simple analogy for a design is a process of arranging a kitchen. You place your stove not far from your sink; glasses and cups in most accessible shelves, etc. You also imagine the sequence of tasks in the

kitchen and place things according to such sequence: you first take out vegetables from the fridge to sink for washing, then to the counter for chopping, then to the stove for cooking. Add to this your aesthetic preference such as painting in cheerful colors. Don't forget the future possibilities, as in keeping one corner clear for future installation of wine cooler. And so on.

### **Perspective**

While you construct your plan following logical steps, you must keep checking with your intuition and maintain an expanded perspective. It will be helpful to ask yourself at each stage, "what does my gut feeling tell me?"

### **Starting Point**

One way to start this is to create a diagram or a list, with categories like these:

- targets (whom or what you want to connect with—family, friends, neighborhood, local, national or global community, and most importantly, yourself)
- rewards or objectives (what you want to gain from the connection, on multiple levels such as financial, emotional, educational, etc.)
- input (time, money, energy, tools, etc.)
- output (all the possible byproducts in addition to rewards, positive or negative)
- time line (in all levels, from short to long-term)
- geographical considerations
- possible secondary and sequential effects, positive or negative
- etc.

## Sample Case

Let me use Donna's plan as an example. She is thinking about decorating boxes for her family as Xmas presents, and using these as her final projects.

Her direct targets are her family members and us. But in the process, she may learn a lot about the technique of decoupage, so she could take photographs of each stage and upload them with instruction to how-to-websites thus expanding her target audience to an infinite number of people. She may make extras that she can donate for charity auctions, or sell them on websites like Etsy.

Her rewards could be her pleasure in making them, her family's appreciation, possible financial reward from sales, getting credits from completing the class, gaining knowledge, etc.

Input would be quite straightforward—her time, cost for material, energy in making them. Output could include negatives like the possibility of her family not liking them or the process being surprisingly difficult. There could be secondary output such as Donna liking the process so much she decides to pursue it in some other way. Or if she sells them or shares her knowledge on the web, that would open up possibilities in unpredictable ways.

Do you get the idea?

## Criteria

At our final meeting, we will have presentations and critiques of our plans. Each of you will have 8 minutes for presentation followed by 7 minutes of critique.

Your plan will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- *Feasibility*—is the plan realistic, at least in the initial steps?
- *Range of targets*—does it aim to connect with a wide range of targets?
- *Depth of connections*—does it aim to make deep connections? (These two compensate for each other, i.e., if your target is broad then your connection can be shallow, vice versa)
- *Strength of objectives*—does it clearly and strongly state at least one objective?

- *Input and Output ratio*—does it aim for maximum output from minimum input? In other words, if your plan calls for complex planning and execution, it must aim for a wide range of targets and rewards.
- *Timeline consideration*—does it take into account all different levels of timeline, in setting and achieving goals, from short-term to long-term?
- *Adaptability*—is it capable of alteration in changing circumstances?

The overall impression will also be considered in the following points:

- Do you feel excited, passionate, committed about the project and its goals?
- Are you having fun constructing your plans and carrying out the project?
- Are you keeping the balance between small details and a big picture?
- Does this project make you feel more connected with yourself and the outside world?

### **Technical Details**

- Your project can be at any stage—conception, planning, execution, etc.
- Your project can be of any scale (could be anything from making a cup of coffee to curtailing the greenhouse effect), as long as your plan is consistent in proportion.
- Your project can be in any media. *However*, it must be accompanied by a written document, preferably a composite of text, images and diagrams.

### **Note about the Writing Format**

It might be counterintuitive to some of you, but the written document here cannot take the style of a spontaneous free flowing story that we have been enjoying on our blog and WIKI. Your plan must be constructed carefully and logically, with each component being essential and its connections relevant and functional. You must be ruthless in editing out frivolous elements. Remember, all other things being

equal, the most simple design is the most successful (and elegant) solution. Your writing style must reflect this.

Take plenty of time at the planning stage. It's like constructing a three dimensional puzzle: do some thinking before you plunge, and pull back to check its stability often. Sleep on your draft. Revise again and again and yet once again.

But of course—a good design also incorporates a compromise where needed.

The classic, *Elements of Style*, can still be your best tutor if you haven't read it since high school.

### **Finally...**

Are you trembling with excitement? I'm sure I don't have to tell you this, but the final and the most important question to ask:

*are you having fun?*